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Financial Aid Tip of the Month, October 2008

Time for college-bound seniors to think about admissions essays

Many high school seniors will be required to write college admissions essays, especially if they're applying to a private college or university. College admissions officers use the essays to learn more about prospective students and their writing skills.

Some colleges will provide a specific topic, such as how attending their school will help you achieve your goals. Others may ask you to choose from several topics, while some will let you pick the topic yourself.

If you select the topic, write something that shows who you are. For example, don't write about how the war on terrorism has affected you unless you or a member of your family has been directly involved. Instead, pick a topic that will give the admissions officer reading the essay some insight into your thoughts and abilities — and that will make the officer say, "We want this student on our campus."

"Keep the reader in mind — be original," said an admissions officer at one private school. "The admissions staff member reads hundreds of essays. What will make yours stand out? Avoid topics that everyone else will write about."

After you've written a creative essay that shows admissions staff who you are, spend some time polishing it. You'll do a lot of writing while you're in college, and colleges want students who already have a good grasp of writing mechanics.

As one admissions officer said, "We look for grammar and complete sentences, the ability to put cohesive thoughts on paper." That means proofread your essay and have others proofread it, too. Ask your English teacher or counselor to look it over for errors.

Above all, follow the directions. Too many students don't pay attention to the guidelines on length and format. Not following the directions may cost you acceptance to the school you really want to attend.

To learn how to plan and prepare for higher education, visit www.GoHigherKY.org. For more information about student financial aid, visit www.kheaa.com; write KHEAA, P.O. Box 798, Frankfort, KY 40602-0798; or call (800) 928-8926, extension 7381.